

Cinderella

Brandy and Whitney Houston star in the remake of Rodgers and Hammerstein's TV musical.

S3



MARILYN KARRAS, FEATURE EDITOR, 237-2150

Norman Rockwell

SCENE

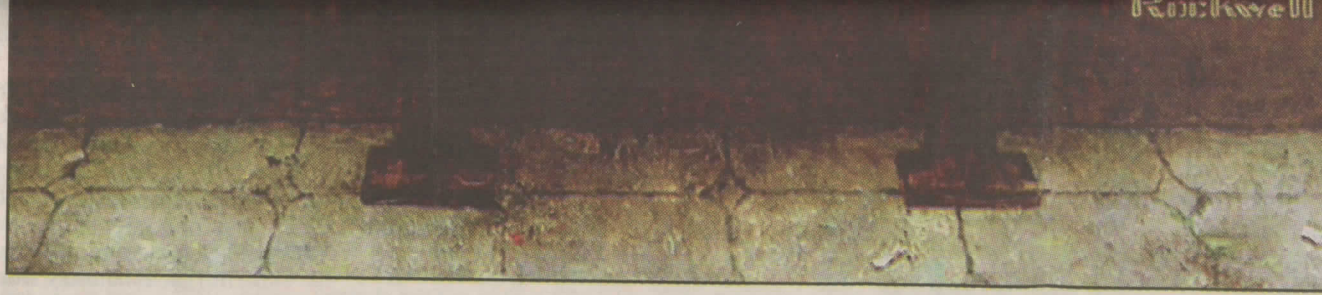
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Half of the 26
works by Norman
Rockwell on
exhibit at the
Springfield
Museum of Art
have never
been seen in
Utah before.

"After the Prom," an original oil painting for the Post cover, May 27, 1947.



N O R M A N R O C K W E L L

By Dave Gagon

Deseret News visual arts writer

*"I didn't want to paint the evil in the world,
I painted the way I would like life to be."*

— Norman Rockwell

IN ROBERT HUGHES' BOOK, "Nothing If Not Critical," the Time magazine art critic recounts an interview he had with Norman Rockwell in 1976, two years before the artist's death. By then, Hughes writes, "Rockwell had outlived his subject matter, and his fundamental decency did not permit him to ignore this fact.

"I really believed that the war against Hitler would bring the Four Freedoms to everyone. But I couldn't paint that today. I just don't believe it."

"In the '60s, glimpses of a less Arcadian society surfaced in his work — most memorably, an illustration of U.S. marshals escorting a small black girl to school in Little Rock."

How then would Rockwell paint today's world, where teenage gangbangers murder for kicks; the homeless suffer from lack of food, medical care and shelter; where families wage war, and love is found flourishing in cyberspace but dwindling in the home?



"The Checkup," a charcoal and graphite sketch.



"Gary Cooper as the Texan," an original oil painting for the Post cover, May 24, 1930.

ROCKWELL

Continued from S1

10-2-97

Rockwell would paint it with the same honesty he brought to all his subjects.

Rockwell's work encouraged the viewing public to pay attention not only to the good times, but also to the social ills. His painting of the little black girl being escorted to school by U.S. marshals is titled, "The Problem We All Live With." Forever the didact, he never stopped preaching with his paint.

Because of today's societal dilemmas, we ache for the safety of Rockwell's world of the '30s, '40s and '50s. In an attempt to rekindle this optimism — and show some of the finest art of the 20th century — the Springville Museum of Art is exhibiting 26 of Rockwell's sketches and paintings through Nov. 30. Half of these works have never before been seen in Utah.

Vern Swanson, director of the museum, believes Rockwell is America's most hated artist and America's most beloved artist. "The primary reason he was disliked was that the common people liked him, and that was inexcusable to the art establishment." When the art director of Post magazine informed the circulation department that Rockwell had another painting ready to be used for a cover, the print order of that week's magazine was increased 250,000 copies.

"I don't think it's jealousy," Swanson says, "I think it's snobbery. The purveyors of 'high art' — be they Guido Rini in the 15th century or Clement Greenberg of the New York school — have always decided what is considered real art and what isn't real art."

Rockwell was also hated by the

art establishment because of his preaching of family values, patriotism and his general positive outlook. "You see," he says, "Rockwell was swimming upstream against the critics."

Gary Rosine, a past professor of art at Brigham Young University, once made the comment that Rockwell's "spring had sprung," meaning his paintings had no tension in them. Swanson disagrees vehemently. "It's all because Rockwell's work didn't go for enigma, which was really a 20th-century holy grail. Rockwell went for spiritual and emotional inclusion. Instead of exclusion through enigmatic work, Rockwell fostered inclusion."

It's this ability to include the viewer in a painting that cemented Rockwell's legacy as a great artist among the common people — people who couldn't care less what the pseudo-intellectuals of the art world think. But perhaps the appropriate approach would be that of S. Lane Faison Jr., who once chaired the art department at Williams College: "Many supporters of modern painting find it necessary to scorn Norman Rockwell while acclaiming, let us say, Jackson Pollock. Why not admit that they are utterly different and be grateful for both of them?"

Rockwell's style of painting was narrative, where stories are told and daily life depicted. It has been a major genre of painting for a long time, even since Pompeii. "But in all of history," Swanson says, "I believe Norman Rockwell to be the greatest narrative, storytelling artist ever. I don't even qualify it. I just say he is the best."

Based upon the ubiquitous calendars, posters and books available on Rockwell — much to the chagrin of the art elite — it seems



Rockwell's paintings depict daily life. The Springville Museum of Art is now exhibiting 26 of his works.

that he will be with us as long as people desire a better world.

There is an admission charge for the Rockwell exhibit. The money will be used to help in the construction costs of the museum's new

wing. Admission for adults is \$3; children, \$1.50; school groups (five or more), \$1; and families, \$10. The Springville Museum of Art is at 126 E. 400 South in Springville, off I-15, exit 263. The museum is

open Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Sunday from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. For more information, call 801-489-7082.